

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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1. Fishing Regulations to be Relaxed at Lake Icaria, Binder Lake, and the Old Corning Reservoir
2. DNR to Host Public Meeting March 31 on Proposed Wildlife Rules
3. Managing Roadsides for Upland Game
4. DNR Receives Federal Grant to Promote Threatened and Endangered Species
5. 2004 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey Sets Record
6. Go Wild With Your Income Tax This Year
7. Signs of Spring – by Joe Wilkinson [**Editors: Hold this column until March 11**]

**FISHING REGULATIONS TO BE RELAXED AT LAKE ICARIA,
BINDER LAKE, AND THE OLD CORNING RESERVOIR**

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will relax some of the fishing regulations at Lake Icaria, Binder Lake, and the Old Corning Reservoir beginning March 15. This will allow anglers to harvest fish before a planned September lake draw down and renovation. Water levels in all three lakes will remain normal until after Labor Day weekend, only Lake Icaria will be lowered at that time.

Anglers will be allowed to use an unlimited number of hooks and lines to harvest fish of any size or number. Anglers must still have a fishing license, remain in sight of all lines, and follow all other fishing regulations and park rules. Liberalized fishing regulations for these three lakes will remain effect until September 7, 2004.

An over population of yellow bass and common carp has lead to dramatic reductions in both the numbers and the quality of all sport fish. The reduced number of sport fish has lead to significant reductions of anglers using the lakes and therefore a substantial loss of economic revenue to the area economy.

During the fish population renovations, drinking water will be drawn from an untreated lake. Fish will be restocked throughout the fall and drinking water will be drawn as water quality returns.

It is very important that anglers never transport yellow bass to any other water system and notify DNR fisheries personnel of any known populations.

For more information contact the Adams County Conservation Board personnel at 641-322-4793, Adams County Conservation Officer, Dave Moore at 712-520-0508 or the Iowa DNR Fisheries at 641-464-3108.

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DNR TO HOST PUBLIC MEETING MARCH 31 ON PROPOSED WILDLIFE RULES

DES MOINES – The Iowa DNR is hosting a public meeting to discuss a number of new proposed regulations covering deer hunting, fall wild turkey hunting, and waterfowl seasons. The meeting will be conducted over the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) on Wednesday, March 31, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

“This is an opportunity for our hunters and people who support wildlife to give us some feedback on these regulations,” said Richard Bishop, chief of the DNR’s wildlife bureau. “We will go over the proposed regulations and take comments from anyone willing to speak, then, if there is any time remaining, we will open the discussion to other topics.”

The one change to the deer rule includes increasing the number of antlerless only permits.

Changes to the fall turkey hunting regulations include increasing the number of licenses available to hunters.

Waterfowl changes include changes in three Canada goose refuges and possible changes in season dates. A new two-day Canada goose hunting season is being proposed for five north central counties.

Other rule changes will address time limits for removing blinds and decoys from wildlife management areas and the controlled hunting program at Lake Odessa.

The DNR will have staff members from the wildlife bureau at each site to help with the meeting.

ICN Locations:

Altoona	Altoona Public Library, 700 8 th Avenue, SW, Room 1
Bettendorf	Scott Community College, 500 Belmont Road, Rooms 101 & 210
Burlington	Great River Area Education Agency 16, 3601 West Avenue Road

Cedar Rapids	Kirkwood Community College 5, 6301 Kirkwood Blvd. SW, Room 104, Washington Hall
Creston	Southwestern Community College 2, 1501 West Townline Rd, Technical Center, Room 107
Council Bluffs	Iowa Western Community College 1, 2700 College Road, Looft Hall
Decorah	Decorah Public Library, 202 Winnebago St.
Dubuque	University of Dubuque, 2000 University Ave., Jackaline Baldwin Dunlap Technology Center, Room T201
Fort Dodge	Fort Dodge High School, 819 N 25 th St., Room 12
Mason City	North Iowa Area Community College, 500 College Dr., Careers Building, Room 128
Ottumwa	Ottumwa High School, 501 E. 2 nd , Voc. Tech. Bldg., Room 157
Sioux City	Western Iowa Tech Community College 2, 4647 Stone Ave., Building A, Room 921
Spencer	Spencer Public Library, 21 East 3 rd St.
Waterloo	Hawkeye Community College, 1501 E. Orange Road, Tama Hall

For more information, contact Bishop at 515-281-6156.

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MANAGING ROADSIDES FOR UPLAND GAME

BOONE – It may not look like it, but spring is here and now is the time to begin thinking about managing roadsides for upland wildlife. Iowa has more than 1.6 million acres of road right-of-ways and when properly managed, these roadsides provide important nesting, roosting, and escape habitat for pheasants, partridge, quail, ducks, rabbits, and many different songbirds.

Unfortunately indiscriminate mowing and ill-timed burning destroys many nests and young each year, said Todd Bogenschutz, wildlife research biologist with the Department of Natural Resources. However, by following a few simple guidelines, roadsides can be very beneficial to upland wildlife.

Nesting for most of Iowa's upland wildlife begins in late April and early May and runs through late summer.

"Many of these species begin nesting before spring green-up so most nests are placed in the old dead vegetation that remains from the previous year. Burning in late spring (mid-April through June) destroys nests and eggs, while mowing in June and July kills hens and chicks," Bogenschutz said.

“Burning can be very beneficial to wildlife if done at the right time and in the right way,” he said. Bogenschutz offered some suggestions to improve roadsides for upland wildlife:

Burn between March 1 and April 15. Burning at this time is before most nesting has begun and encourages native grasses and discourages exotic species and weeds. Native plants provide better habitat for wildlife and prevent the invasion of noxious weeds because of their deep root systems.

Conduct rotational burns. Rotational burning is the practice of burning separate portions of the road ditch in different years. This rejuvenates the grasses in the burned segment, while the unburned segment provides undisturbed nesting and escape habitat for wildlife. A popular scenario is to burn one side of the ditch one year and the other side the next year. Some safety precautions should be followed when burning roadsides: contact neighbors, utility companies, and the local fire department before burning, and be careful of roadside utility poles, telephone junction boxes, and pipelines.

Avoid late fall or early winter (Nov. to Dec.) burning of roadsides. Winter burns eliminate habitat for wildlife and leave ditches exposed to erosion.

Avoid mowing road ditches between April 15 and Aug. 1 to protect nests and young. If weeds are a problem, use spot mowing or spraying to control the problem. Mowing along the shoulder usually does not harm nesting wildlife as most nests are placed in the ditch bottom or on the back slope.

Some state and county agencies provide information for implementing roadside management practices. Contact the county conservation board to find out more about roadside vegetation management programs in your area. “If your county does not have a roadside program, ask them to start one, or contact your local wildlife biologist for more information,” Bogenschutz said.

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DNR RECEIVES FEDERAL GRANT TO PROMOTE THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources received a second two-year grant of \$180,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to promote awareness of threatened or endangered species in Iowa.

Kelly Smith, coordinator of the DNR’s Landowner Incentive Program, said the grant would be used to pull together information from various sources on threatened and endangered species in Iowa, and to provide that information in a user-friendly and accessible way. It will also be used to educate private lands staff to better identify threatened and endangered species.

“People are aware of the rainforests and species that live in that delicate ecosystem,” Smith said. “What we are working on is to increase awareness of the threatened and endangered species in our own backyard.”

Smith has already created an interactive mapping tool available on the DNR’s website listing threatened and endangered species by county. Users can click on the county and a list pops up showing species by category and listing.

“Our goal is to make this information more user friendly and accessible to landowners, private organizations, other government agencies and to our private lands staff,” Smith said. “We also want to raise the awareness of threatened and endangered species in Iowa.”

First Round of Grants to be Scored March 15

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will begin judging projects submitted for funding under the Landowner Incentive Program on March 15. The Landowner Incentive Program assists private landowners to identify threatened and endangered species on their property, and to provide a plan to improve the habitat to protect those species. Projects that are selected will begin work this summer.

“This is the first set of projects that will receive funding under the program,” said Kelly Smith, coordinator for the program.

Funding for these projects is part of a grant the DNR received last year from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to improve habitat on private land protecting threatened and endangered species. The three-year grant provides the DNR \$300,000 each year to assist private landowners to improve critical habitat for these species.

For more information, contact Smith at 515-281-6247

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2004 MIDWINTER BALD EAGLE SURVEY SETS RECORD

BOONE – An estimated 4,432 bald eagles spent part of their winter in Iowa breaking the previous record of 2,493 set in 2001. The count is part of the midwinter bald eagle survey conducted in January by DNR staff and volunteers.

The number of immature bald eagles surveyed continues to rise. In 2004, more than 40 percent of the eagles counted were juveniles. “This is a substantial juvenile population and seems to indicate the overall population is stable or growing,” said Mark McInroy, wildlife technician at the DNR’s Boone research station.

The survey also showed that there is about 160 established eagle nests in 61 Iowa counties. "The future of eagles certainly looks promising," McInroy said.

The Iowa survey results will be added to neighboring states that will provide a better picture of the eagle population. Eagle populations have been on the increase over the last decade.

The survey is done along the same routes each year.

For more information, contact McInroy at 515-432-2823.

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GO WILD WITH YOUR INCOME TAX THIS YEAR

BOONE – More than 400 non-game wildlife species depend on the generosity of Iowans who contribute to the Fish and Wildlife Fund - Chickadee Check-off, on their state income tax form. The fund is used by the DNR's wildlife diversity program to host bald eagle viewing days, hawk watch migrations, and river otter and trumpeter swan re-introductions.

The wildlife diversity program is involved with a number of important projects including developing a breeding bird atlas, installing urban wildlife plantings and acquiring wildlife habitat. There are also several specific Iowa-based research studies underway.

A 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife survey found more than 94 percent of Iowans spend \$1.1 billion each year on bird watching, bird feeding and wildlife photography. But less than \$150,000 has been donated to these causes directly through the non-game program.

Non-game wildlife makes up 80 percent of Iowa's wildlife resources. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Program depends on donations through the Chickadee Check-off on Iowa state income tax forms.

For more information about the Wildlife Diversity Program write: Wildlife Diversity Program, Iowa DNR, 1436 255th Street, Boone, Iowa 50036.

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[Hold this column until March 11]

SIGNS OF SPRING

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The surest way to guarantee a March blizzard is to mention the word ‘spring’. Well, get out the snow blower, because it *is* starting to look—and feel—that way.

Oh, nothing really dramatic, yet. Small, reddish buds are visible on the twig-tips of some of the softwood trees. Every week I see a few more robins. Sure, a few of them stick around during the winter. I’m talking small flocks, though. Still, notwithstanding a couple late season snowfalls, the Big Switch is underway.

Signs of that transition hit you just about anywhere you go outdoors. “Canada geese are staking out the smaller wetlands,” notes Department of Natural Resources waterfowl biologist Guy Zenner. “They are still in their family groups, but as the adults pair off, they will drive the young ones away from their nesting territory.” Other waterfowl are making their first stops in Iowa, too. A few pintails and mallards are noticeable; the very front of the northward migration. “We still have a lot of ice up here (in Clear Lake), but there is some sheet water in the fields that ducks are using,” says Zenner. “There is some running water from tile lines and creeks that create open spots (in the bigger streams). The ducks are clustered in those places.”

A week ago, I watched as big chunks of Mississippi River ice rushed downstream at Dubuque. Most of that big ice is history. “A lot of the backwaters are open now. Bussey Lake is breaking up this week,” passes along Karen Aulwes, fisheries technician in Guttenberg. “The milder weather spreads out the eagles, too. They were really concentrated around the tailwaters here, during the coldest weather.” She says anglers are part of the change in seasons; abandoning their ice fishing gear for open water sauger. “Some bigger sauger are being taken. Not a lot of people are out yet, though,” says Aulwes. As the water temperature rises to 39 degrees (it was about 34 degrees on Monday morning) fisheries crews will converge on Guttenberg in the annual northern spawn; netting brood fish and collecting eggs to hatch and raise for stocking in inland streams.

Bruce Ehresman sees the subtle changes, too. For him, though, there is one ‘can’t miss’ sign. “Turkey vultures,” says Ehresman. “They don’t like the cold. They are the true harbingers of spring.” The DNR wildlife diversity biologist based at Boone, says he’s had reports of several, already. Other than that, he’s noticed large numbers of blackbirds, especially red-winged blackbirds in the past couple weeks. Male red-wings and those of various other species, like bluebirds, usually arrive first, to stake out likely nesting areas. And the wake up call is not limited to just feathered creatures. “I just saw a tiger salamander (e-mailed photo) this morning,” says Ehresman. “Some one saw it in northern Boone County in the last couple days. That seems awfully early, but March is listed as the month for it to start laying eggs.”

The switch to spring means a return to hunting for some of us. Snow geese are packing into and flying through wildlife areas in southwest Iowa, on their way north to severely overcrowded nesting areas in the Hudson Bay region. A special conservation order extends hunting for snows—and other light geese—through April 15. “We have about 30,000 on the area,” reports DNR wildlife worker John Ross, from the Riverton wildlife unit. “We are seeing a lot of birds. Hunting with decoys has been kind of slow, since they come over in such big flocks.” Large numbers of white-fronted geese (not to be hunted in spring) are coming through, too. Workers on the Otter Creek wildlife area near Tama reported 10,000 in the last week.

And a string of warm days gets turkeys and turkey *hunters* making the transition, too. That season is barely more than a month away. Meanwhile, the turkeys—so visible against a white background of snow—are better camouflaged now, with the drab browns and grays of late winter. A couple warm mornings will coax out the first gobblers from the toms, as well as mouth-call induced hen clucks from the pretenders, practicing for Opening Day.

Sure, a cold snap or late season blanket of snow will turn back the calendar for a few days. Sunshine and a 50 degree March day, though, still beat a string of subzero January mornings, waiting for spring to get here.

Wildlife Week Coming, Materials Running Late

National Wildlife Week approaches and the teacher packets and poster contest announcements are on the way, too.

The NWF has pushed back distribution dates for the packets this year. 10,000 are distributed across the state by the Iowa Wildlife Federation, which also sponsors a statewide poster contest for students in grades 1-6. “We have the contest inserts ready to add, as the educator packets arrive in Iowa in the next couple weeks,” notes IWF Vice President Loren Forbes. “We know it will be a tight turnaround, but should still have the materials in classrooms and conservation centers in time for pre-Wildlife Week activities and for those posters to be completed.”

This year’s theme, ‘*What’s YOUR Habitat?*’, challenges students to look around their neighborhoods and recognize the wild species that share a habitat with them. The deadline for submitting winning posters to the IWF is May 2.

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